

ANN ARBOR, MICH.
NEWS

MAY 8 1961

EVENING 28,729

MAY 8 1961

From Our Point Of View:

Should All Responsibility Be Placed On One Man?

DAVID LAWRENCE raised some extremely important questions about the presidency in one of his recent columns on this page, and suggested some possible answers. Much more discussion of this matter is needed.

Lawrence's question, in essence, was the old one of whether it makes sense to continue expecting one man to handle the job. Or, put another way, was the recent flurry of blunders and near-blunders in U. S. foreign policy due solely to the relative inexperience of our young chief executive, or is there something wrong with the executive system itself? Most Americans who follow public affairs are asking these questions with some uneasiness.

Much of the uneasiness is caused, unquestionably, by decreased confidence in President Kennedy. Some observers in Washington feel that he was not "protected" from bad advice on Cuba by such men as Chester Bowles and Dean Rusk, and others who have had more personal experience in foreign affairs than the President. Others believe that Kennedy was not given much advice of any sort, good or bad, and that CIA is making U.S. policy on Cuba and Laos without adequately consulting Washington. In either case, something is clearly wrong in the administrative system. Blaming the recent mistakes entirely on Kennedy's personal judgment may satisfy highly partisan observers, but it doesn't give any guidance for improving the organization he will head for at least four more years.

THERE IS NO REASON to believe that anything is basically wrong with the President's judgment on foreign policy. Other recent Presidents were sometimes unable to present well thought-out policies in crucial situations. This suggests that modern Presidents are so overwhelmed with foreign and domestic problems of varying importance that they lack time to adequately think out solutions to the most important ones. Columnist Lawrence suggests that a "cabinet council" is needed to meet daily and advise the President. The idea, apparently, would

planned alternative policies on major problems, leaving only the final choice to the President. This sounds very much like what is already done; at least theoretically, by the National Security Council, although that body meets only at the President's request. Requiring it to meet daily would not mean that the President would accept its advice more readily than he does now. He would still want time to evaluate its suggestions. And he does not have this time under the present organization of the executive department.

It seems probable that a system will be developed under which a group of men, rather than one man, makes top-level policy decisions. None of our major allies has a one-man executive system (except France under De Gaulle). At first impression, this sounds like a radical change; in practice, it is the system we have now. Some top-level decisions are made by cabinet officials and merely approved by the President. This was almost certainly true of the Justice Department's recent decision to make the federal government a plaintiff in school integration decisions.

ALL THAT IS LACKING is a means of making cabinet officers more responsible to the voters. Nothing so drastic as making them elective is required. It should be enough to require them to explain their policies to Congress in scheduled question periods. This would not mean requiring congressional approval, by vote, of their decisions. Any such requirement would be a breakdown in the system outlined by the Constitution. Most cabinet officials already submit to periodic questioning by newsmen. Requiring them to outline their policies before Congress would simply be legal recognition of the system already in existence. It would leave the President with a clear duty to devote most of his time to only the most important problems—meaning chiefly foreign affairs and basic economic problems.

These criticisms and suggestions are almost as old as the nation. But they are due for renewed considera-